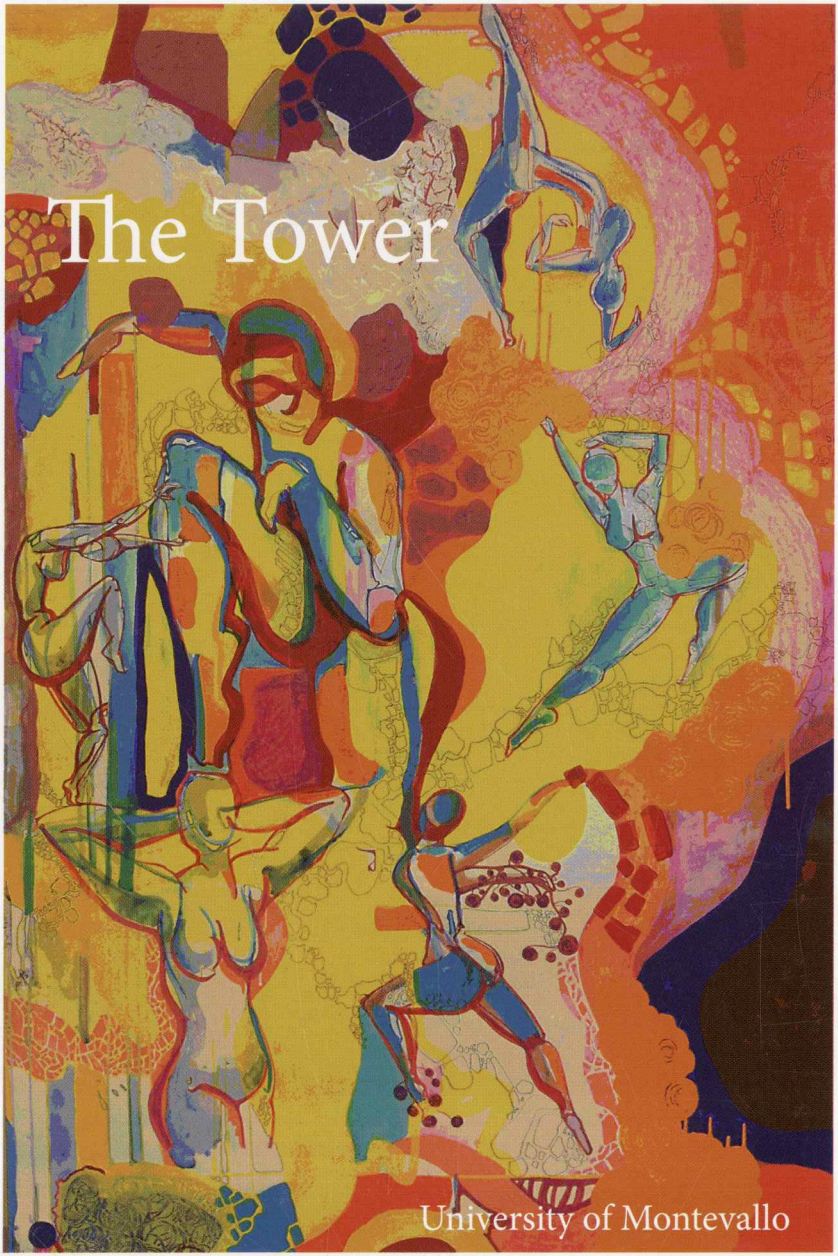
The Tower
University of Montevallo

The Tower

2013

"Laurel and bay leaf wither when aged hands pluck them. Only youth has a right to crown an artist. That is the real privilege of being young, if youth only knew it."
--Oscar Wilde

Acknowledgements

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Poetry

Carrie Busby
Climacus

I wish I could believe
Like a child
And cry
Like the broken.

There's an isolation
In disbelief—

An outsider in a world
Of camaraderie—

An antisocial intellectuality
In nothing—

A meaning drained:
An empty poisonous vapor.

And all is unholy,
And all is nothing,
And nothing is—

Like a high tower constructed

Of coldness—stone,
Of hardness—dry,
Of oneness—empty,
Of realness—a void.

It's hard to breathe in the collective of one.

And, none
To share
The air
Of silence
Stifles the lungs,
Locks the mouth,
Talks to self—
Suffocating—
With no response—
And swelling heart
Of blood—
Hardened.

So, instead,
I
Fantasize of fucking Father Alexis
On the altar
In the chapel,

And I am saved—

My faith reborn—

In Grace.

Brandon Chance Carruthers
depths of shadows

When pennies raise replicas, not worthies,
Painted foulness might kick off there,
I'm something working in the night,
These crimes lived out with him,
Especially a brother outraged and scared,
Yes, he's getting worn and working,
Lend him sovereignty,
Where your chosen flourish make trigger,
Dead appointments made of wicked tongues,
We see here only what we understand,
Her corruption box passes young needs,
To curse nothing pleasant nor tender,
Because Heaven turns this scumbag unfamiliar.

Leilani Hayes
Happy Birthday, Clarisse

In loving memory of Ray Bradbury
Happy birthday, Clarisse
How's life at eighteen?
Where are you tonight?
Tell me what sights you've seen.
Through the books that I've read
You're the voice in my head
You are all that the world could have been.

Happy Birthday, Clarisse
Please say that you're fine
Wherever you are
Drinking dandelion wine
You could have played a part
Could have touched many hearts
But if nothing else, girl, you've touched mine.

Happy Birthday, Clarisse
I'm not gonna cry
You made the choice,
You were willing to die.
But today we're alone
To make this life our own
And we've got nothing left but to try

Happy Birthday, Clarisse. We will try.

Candice Crutchfield
Malignant Spirits

You hear the whispers through the trees?
You smell the fear & see the disease…

Do you wonder where it comes from?
Does it make you feel freakishly numb?

The darkness does not just lurk here.
It is found nearly everywhere.

The killer's eyes are just so pretty.
The demon is so elegantly witty.

The chills running up your back, they're not fake.
As a matter of fact, they're tremendously real…So don't mistake.

The disturbed thoughts you think are not of your brain.
The thoughts are transported from the evil beings creations…
And into your skull to discombobulate you, maybe.

The motive is what we can never be sure.
I don't think this infection can ever be cured.

This scar on my arm…this scar on my heart,
I can remember exactly where it did start.

Not too long ago, the contemplations erupted.
But it seems like forever since I have been corrupted.

Time is my enemy until I am saved.
Perhaps the monstrosity inside me will die off someday.

Madison Howard
She

Unused and wasted, excess waste

None have ever known the taste,

Nor seen the face of satisfaction,

The face that uneaten bread may bring,

The song that undrunk mead may sing

It's not a lie I speak to you

The truth I tell is ever true --

Bitten apple spills the seed,

Fruit will spoil when not in need

Where is my worm?

Where is She?

Evan Patton

Requiem for the South
--Inspired by "The Cup Song"

In that ol' rickety piece of yours
we rode rattled by the September winds.
The smell of diesel, sweet skin, and peach tea mixed with the tar-tinge of pungent, cotton-blossom and wrapped around the standing hairs on my prickly arms, when you turned on the radio and we sang along.

I've got my ticket for the long way 'round,
Two bottles of whiskey for the way,
And I'm leavin' tomorrow, whatdya say?

In that sweet southern melody of yours,
I found the distant echo of jasmine blossoms,
pushing memories like petals through your open eyes, honey brown and melting with the sweet cream molasses sunset,
the buttermilk horizon poured into the skyline
as you pushed that petal to the floor,
just chasin' the dream.

When I'm gone, when I'm gone,
You're gonna miss me when I'm gone.
You're gonna miss me by my hair,
You're gonna miss me everywhere,
And I know you're gonna miss me when I'm gone.

In that long run from the highway blues,
where the sweetest southern winds blow--
Honey, that sun was settin' fast,

but we were movin' faster.
And lord we ran, and ran, and ran
headfirst into that blinding sun.

The one with the prettiest view.
It's got mountains, it's got rivers,
It's got sights to give you shivers,
but it sure would be prettier with you.

When I'm gone, when I'm gone
You're gonna miss me when I'm gone.
You're gonna miss me by my walk,
You're gonna miss me by my talk,
You're gonna miss me when I'm gone.

And in that moment we burned with the fire of a thousand suns past,
into the eternal bliss of coke-n-peanuts,
late-night crickets, and front-porch Zen
while the sweet wind whispered,
"I'll be your Huckleberry Finn."
Then with a wink, I just went down
and kissed that red-clay ground.

You're gonna miss me by my hair,
You're gonna miss me everywhere,
and I know you're gonna miss me
when I'm gone.

Angie Batt
the keychain

she was usually the type to misplace things,
her mind a black hole of knowledge and commodities.
when she headed up north she brought a bag,
a tent and an empty head—left it all behind.
well, she got higher and higher across the states
and thought she left her keys somewhere safe.
I watched her learn and grow, rise and accelerate
reach a new level of vibration, so far off the ground
I told her "don't lose your keys on your way back to me"
she said "I've made it habit to collect them as I go"
assuring me "I'll find my way back though"
the time of travel appeared and passed then
she came out a white hole with the keys to the universe
but she never found that safe place, that prized keychain.
that girl lost her keys and couldn't come home
so she's lonely and cold, at a higher elevation.

Jessica Hamlin
Earthly Bond

"But the only tune that the fiddle would play was
Oh the wind and the rain,
The only tune that the fiddle would play was
Oh, the dreadful wind and rain."
-American Folk, Traditional

In the dark
with the ceiling fain slowly
breathing a breeze

gently knocking together,
I am holding her.
I feel her body shudder
as we are curled up into a ball
on her bed.
Because another Son
has burned her,
got her hot and
made her float to the heavens,
only to leave her cold when
things started to get heavy.
And now her tears are falling,
She's pouring her heart
into my shoulder
(getting it soaking wet)
And at this moment,
She wants me to carry her away,
And at this moment,
I want to.
Oh the wind and the rain,

But if we blew and poured together,
what would stand?
Such storms destroy church steeples.
They destroy gardens.
They destroy homes.
They destroy whole civilizations.
Oh, the dreadful wind and rain.

But her tears beat against the pain in my heart,
that natural longing to nurture her,
to nudge her over wide plains,
to hold her closer and rock her to the mountains
and the oceans,

then back to the mountains,
then back to the oceans,
Until the sirens sound and sang
of the song that we are forcing nature to sing with us,
Of the trees we've uprooted,
Of the boulders we've moved,
Of the oceans we've raised.
Oh the wind and the rain,

But I am a dry wind.
A wind that sweeps prophets
to the heavens.
A singular Pentacostal wind
sent to blow minds
And if I get wet,
if I chase storms,
The shutters will be shut to me.
I will be soggy with regrets,
Vainly blowing hot air
into a cold front.
Tearing lives up into my eye
of angst and desire.
Oh, the dreadful wind and rain.

I sigh
And push her head
from my shoulder
to the top of it
(praying it will dry)

And Rane whispers into my ear,
"Wendy, sing me a song."
Oh the wind and the rain
So, softly,

I howl our song
into the storm,
praying no one will hear
but knowing that as
long as there is rain,
there will be wind to guide
it
and the song of this storm
will sound forever.
Because this wind will
never
die.

Oh, the dreadful wind and rain.

Evan Patton
Safety Word

Master of mine,
won't you enslave me?
Would you be so kind,
master of mine?

Pour up the wine
for I am in waiting.
Master of mine,
won't you enslave me?

With a mouth full of wine,
will you not let my mouth
speak?
Yet my tongue must abide
with a mouth full of wine.

Is the matter of time?
Will my breath from my lungs leak?
With a mouth full of wine,
will you not let my mouth speak?

Now my words are but nigh
while my eyes curse a blue streak.
On my knees, I oblige.
now my words are but nigh.

Now my teeth are in binds
and my breath through my throat eeks.
Now my words are but nigh
and my eyes curse a blue streak.

Angie Batt
Celestial Sadist

Just as the moon,
the sun has a dark side too.
From here he seems so warm
and welcoming, so bright.
But he enjoys his nights off
and the occasional day as well.
It is then he leaves us in the dark
and lets the clouds creep over.
On a stormy afternoon he rests
while the clouds transfer terror.
The next morning he wakes us.
He beams over the destruction,
as if to laugh at us mere mortals and
the despair his absence brings.

It is only in the ruins we truly see
the darker side of our solar light,
and we remember our dependence
on this sadistic celestial being.
For after all, when he destroys himself
he will bring us all into the darkness.

Candice Hardwick
Facing Home

The doors have been barred,
Bolts rusted and passkeys changed,
An abandoned shelter made of bricks,
Screams and tears for four years caged.

The gateway opens, spilling its stench.
Must, abandonment, and hate in which furniture is drenched,
It seems you are cemented in spite.
Ms. Havisham isn't even as anchored to days gone by.

The aspiration for my homecoming
Baffles even those with whom I am close.
Just acknowledge what you did and why
Then, I will return it to you in a healthy dose.

More expressive than empty words or phrases,
Are porcelain-doll faces, painted and cracked.
In the corner of the roseate niche
A dead, little mouse for months trapped.

Imagine a harsh childhood wrapped up and packed away.
A part of life that person no longer claims.

Easier to forget and allow to deteriorate,
Yet still, here lie possessions that can't or won't be thrown away.

Angel Williams
Secrets

I walk down the rose-strewn path,
not thinking to check for bones
buried beneath the surface of earth
above which grow large, voluptuous bushes
Yet twisted around my ankles
– transparent to me as I do not look down –
are white lies masked with small kisses,
well-kept secrets guarded by a handshake,
and isolation from those who hold my heart
Because no longer am I a thing of comfort.
It's nervousness, anxiousness, a desire
to keep me ignorant. Give me the knowledge!
Rather than cast me aside to
walk my desolate life alone,
oblivious to the fading reminders of
echoing footsteps that followed mine.

Jessica Hamlin
Panoramic Sugar Egg

I'm sorry Baby,
But you can't fit in that egg.
I know it tempts you
Sparkling and colorfully
Frosted.
I picked it out for you.

I knew you would be confused
When you first held it in your hands
But I sat there
Like I knew I would
And watched you turn and flip it
Until you spotted the hole
And looked into it
Like I knew you would.
I watched you smile at the whimsically manufactured scene
Of candy chicks nestled in icing grass
And paper bunnies peering with lifeless eyes
All surrounded in a glittering sugar dome
With minimum oxygen.
Your smile cracked wide
As you held the egg to the light
And I knew you were imagining yourself there
In that crumbly sweet existence
But it will never happen.
Try as you might,
You'll never dance in that tiny world.
But come here,
Let me dry your tears.
Let me take your hands
And lead you outside to a world much bigger than you
With green fingers waiting to graze you
A wind willing to whisper to you
And a sun longing to kiss your face
But first
You have to put down that egg.

Angel Williams
To you, I Question

To you, I question
What reason do you have to be in my thoughts?
You, whom I used to ponder my hours on,
You, whose lithe frame fits so well under that baggy shirt,
You, whose soft hair rejects the sunlight so adamantly,
I had moved away from you. I had gone on.
Yet, unknown to my not yet conscious mind,
You inserted yourself back onto the railroad of my thoughts.
You came to me, at the most inopportune moment,
and offered to open your arms to me and all of me.
I had separated myself, however. I had demeaned those ideas.
He came to me before the aforementioned.
He came to me and picked me up and slung me around,
and my feet have just begun to feel the ground again.
There, you again. But with the possibility of another.
But in the space of that time, my brain digresses.
And on my couch, you lay.
And behind one or two of the many doors that organize my mental chaos,
I might take note of the fact that I can see us laughing at insignificant jokes still in ten years time.
And behind another door, I could go too deep into how all I see when I think of his image
Is rotting daffodils, a favorite of mine with surprise visits and abrupt departures.

Lila Dostal

Melting an Iceberg That Won't Be Quiet

It's a long walk home; the night is humid and starless.
At the party dazzling white light shone through glass
and lit up her face; she said to me "I feel loved."
"Tell me: have you ever been afraid like this?"
but that's not really something you should ask people.
People get nervous when you remind them they are mortal.
When I left, I heard someone turn on the sink tap.
I smoked a cigarette on the porch stoop and then began my walk.

Just because we start things, that in no way means we have the power to finish them.
She is an oxymoron wrapped in flesh and blood. I am courting a psychopath.
Someone has forgotten to take out their trash, and it reeks in the moist air.
The world outside her house was gray and quiet.
It was the flu season but none of us were sick yet.
I paused near the intersection of Paul Bryant, where cars usually come and go even at 3 AM.
None were around, that was my first clue something was not right.
When you come to know certain things as unshakable truths, you find that you yourself are shaken when they become untrue.

Turning around, hearing the grind of pebbles underneath my boots-
sludge, mixed from rainwater the night before.
She was there; she is always there. The devil does not leave a man

so easily.
"You need to slow down before you kill yourself." She warned me.
I had left her house only seconds before, and she had been in the kitchen.
How was she here now- and yet I laugh at myself.
She is always there. The devil does not leave a man so easily.
"You look like you need a coffee enema." She laughs; I am not amused.
When she laughs her voice is high and thin;
it reminds me that I am dreaming.

The hum of bugs hung in the air around us, filling up the silence where our screams were in waking.
Her laughter has stopped. Mine never started.
This is how souls dance when they don't have a ballroom.
They beat against one another with a flutter of wings and words.
They try to create their own atmosphere.

"Where did you go?" She asks. This her voice. This is real.
This is not the devil talking. This is the echo of her shell.
"I don't understand why you don't trust me." She added, and there is hurt beneath her comment.
I do not answer, because in dreams we cannot outpace what scares us,
and our voices are muted because God shoves cotton down our throats.
We learn too much when the physical world isn't around to stop us.
"I never knew you could be so cruel." She sniffs.
She's getting ridiculous; but I'm starting to realize why I am here.

"Let's try again from the beginning?" She urges, and her pace has changed.
Now she wants to let go of the pain. Now she wants forgiveness.
Turning around, hearing the grind of pebbles underneath my boots-
sludge, mixed from rainwater the night before.
I am there; I am always there. The truth does not leave a woman so easily.

"Nothing you say will make this better." My voice resonates.
The bugs fall quiet, the air grows thin.
The world slips away because the world doesn't hold when its laws break

Thomas Hardy once wrote "The Convergence of the Twain"
and wondered if the Titanic and the iceberg were built by the same cosmic seize.

On a muggy Alabama side street, the iceberg melted.
The ship sailed home.
We both woke up.

Evan Patton
First Person

gestures of possible pasts ripple
through fluttering leaves
like prisms fractured after capturing light,
imploding into primary blue, yellow, red—
and is this love that I see,

through raven's-eye pupils

thirsting for a scorched soul?
quenched by the static page
when I saw movement
in measurable time—
and is this you that I see,

through the echoes
of black and white leaves
bouncing from a flat
surface to fragile thought?
We reflect in loss of "I,"
self-reference infinitely regressing
into a mirror that has seen nothing
if not another mirror—

and when you read,
do We not live the same?

ART

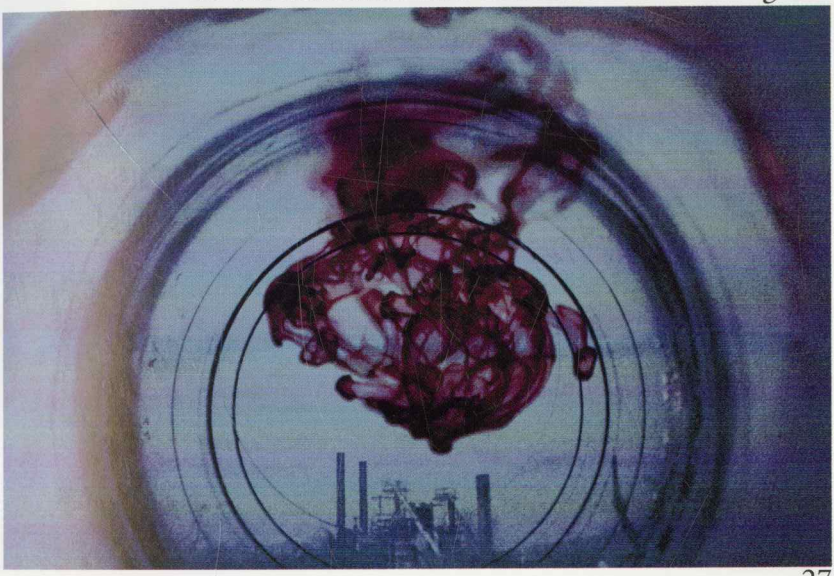
(Photography, Painting, Mixed Media)

Madison Howard
Untitled

Amber Orr
Psychedelic Muliebrity Part One

Madison Howard
Hive

Nabih Iqal
Be The Radiant Flame You Have Been Waiting For



La Toya T. Peeples
50 - Years - Bloody Sunday 2013 - Still Struggling

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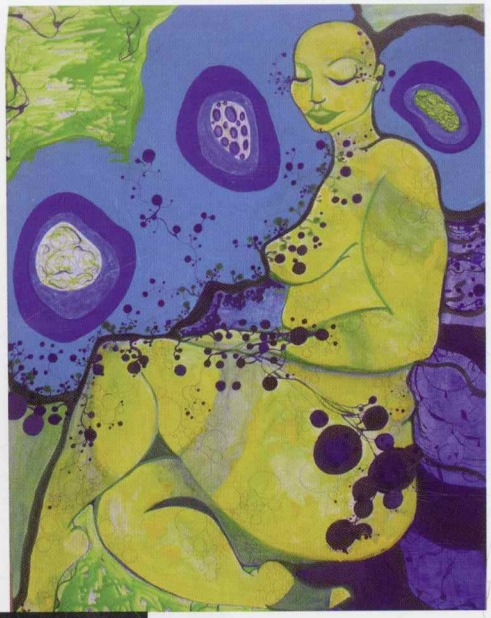
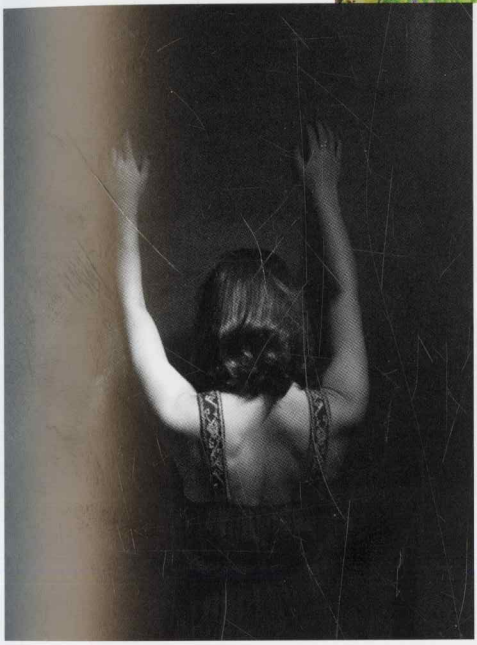
John Albea
Parallelogram

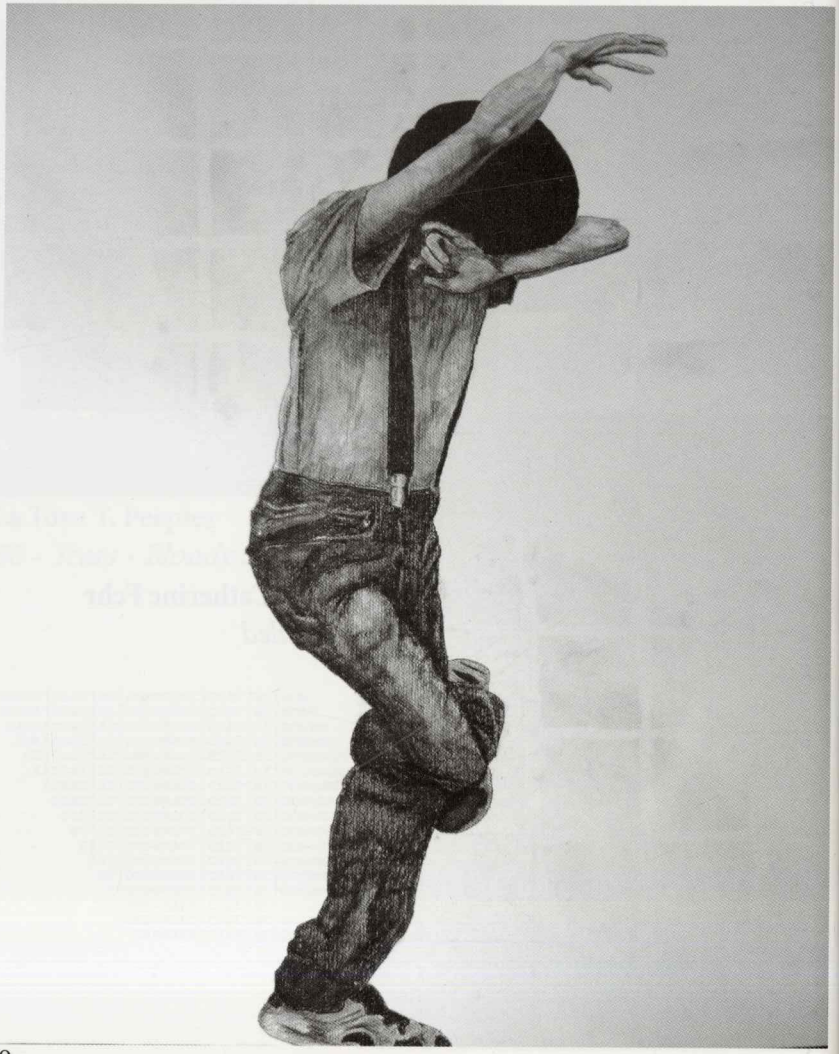
Amber Orr
Psychedelic Muliebrity
Part Two





Mary Catherine Fehr
Untitled

Madison Howard
Tony



PLAYS

Morning

By: Jade Rice

This play is dedicated to the memory of Christopher Ross Beard. (January 24th, 1985- July 20th, 2012).

This play was written to be performed in a black box theatre or other intimate space.

Characters:

Girl: An artist in her early twenties. Could possibly be attractive, but is in complete disarray. She appears sleep-deprived, lost, and endlessly restless and confused. She seems to be searching for something, though she doesn't seem to know what.

Other: A girl: petite, agile, and bright. She is a daredevil at heart, and rarely apologizes for anything. She is childlike in many ways, and there is something almost mystical about her. She is sprite-like and has a supreme amount of energy and focus.

Him/He: A guy in his late twenties. Charming, funny, rough around the edges. He is extremely guarded and occasionally prideful, but at his core he has the most generous of human spirits. He appears sluggish and weighed down.

Setting:
Very early morning.
A space of exquisite loneliness. A space meant for creativity. An empty space.

Synopsis (Log line): A disoriented artist is startled when she receives an abrupt, unexpected visit from a former friend.

Scene 1:

The GIRL has fallen asleep sprawled on the floor surrounded by half-completed charcoal drawings. She has charcoal marks on her arms and smudges on her face and her hair is a mess. She's wearing yesterday's makeup, yesterday's clothes.

The lights come up. We see the GIRL lying motionless on the floor. The OTHER bursts into the room, wearing all black. She darts around the room playing with a toy revolver. She engages in a stylized gunfight with an imaginary opponent. After a struggle, she defeats her opponent and strides toward center stage, satisfied. She notices the GIRL. She walks over to The GIRL and tries to arouse her with her foot. The GIRL doesn't respond.

OTHER:

Morning, sunshine! *(She notices the charcoal drawings.)* These look the same as they did yesterday. C'mon, wake up! Hmmm. *(She tries another tactic. She does a dance and sings Digital Underground's "Humpty Dance" to the GIRL.)*

"All right! Stop whatcha doin', cause
I'm about to ruin
The image and the style that ya used to
I look funny - but yo I'm making money, see
So yo world I hope you're ready for me..."

"...So yo world I hope you're ready for me"?! Hello?!Wake Up!

Wake up! Ugh! You're such a curmudgeon. Well, fine. You leave me no choice. *(She darts to another part f the space. Then, she whips around and points her toy revolver at the GIRL's head.)* Time to wake up, you silly bitch!

(She pulls the trigger of the toy gun, but when she does we hear the sound of an actual gunshot. The GIRL sits bolt upright. She brings her hand to her right temple. Her eyes dart around the room in panic. The OTHER, seeing this, erupts in laughter.)

GIRL:

What the fuck was that?!

OTHER:

Relax. I was just playing.

GIRL:

Put that down.

OTHER:

What?

GIRL:

Put the gun down.

OTHER:

Oh please, it's not real. Come on, play with me.

GIRL:

No. Put the gun down.

OTHER:

No.

GIRL:

Put it down NOW!! *(The GIRL takes the toy from her and slams it down.)*

OTHER:

Jesus. Give me a break.

(The GIRL crosses back to her drawings and the OTHER retreats to another part of the space. A moment passes. Then, from the darkness, a young man enters. HE seems fixated on the GIRL. For a moment, it looks as if HE may turn and leave. HE looks back and forth between the GIRL and the OTHER. Then, HE clears his throat. The GIRL and the OTHER see him at the same time. They are stunned. Silence.)

GIRL:

What the fuck are you doing here?

OTHER:

It's you!

HIM:

It's me. *(The OTHER runs and leaps into his arms. He embraces her & spins her around.)*

OTHER:

Oh my God! Oh my God! OH MY GOD!!! It's you, it's you, it's you, it's you!

HIM:

It's me! It's me! It's me! It's me!

OTHER:

He's here! He came!

GIRL:

I see that.

OTHER:

We've missed you.

GIRL:

No, we haven't.

OTHER:

Yes we have.

GIRL:

No. We haven't.

HIM:

Yes, you have.

GIRL:

Why haven't you called me?

(The OTHER abruptly turns and shoots HIM a look. He knows what she's going to do before she begins. It's the "Humpty Dance". They sing and dance together.)

OTHER & HIM:

"I drink up all the Hennessy ya got on ya shelf
So just let me introduce myself
My name is Humpty, prounounced with a "Umpty"
Yo ladies, oh how I like to hump thee
And all the rappers in the the top ten--"

GIRL:

Would you CUT IT OUT?!

OTHER:

"Would you cut it out?!"

HIM:

You're such a curmudgeon.

GIRL:

No, I'm not.

HIM:

Oh, yes you are.

GIRL:

No. I'm not.

OTHER:

Prove it.

GIRL:

...No. No way.

OTHER:

Come on!

GIRL:

Nope.

HIM:

Just look at her, an old lady. Curmudgeon. Such a shame.

OTHER:

Such a pity!

HIM:

Such a pity.

OTHER:

A crying shame!

HIM:

So sad.

OTHER:

TERRIBLE!

HIM:

TRAGIC!

GIRL:

ALRIGHT! Alright, alright. Fine, okay? Fine.

(The GIRL gets up and joins the other two. The three get into formation, as if they have done this a thousand times before. "The Humpty Dance" song fades in. At first, the girls function as his backup dancers, but then they sing with HIM on the chorus and the three become equals. HE takes all the lead vocals and the girls sing each "Do me baby!" in addition to the chorus. At first, the dance should seem choreographed, but into the chorus the three should break away from the choreography and dance together freely.)

HIM:
"I once got busy in a Burger King bathroom
I'm crazy.
Allow me to amaze thee.
They say I'm ugly but it just don't faze me.
I'm still gettin' in the girls' pants
and I even got my own dance"

ALL THREE:
"The Humpty Dance is your chance to do the hump
Do me, baby! Do the Humpty Hump, come on and do the Humpty Hump
Do me, baby! Do the Humpty Hump, just watch me do the Humpty Hump
Do me, baby! Do ya know what I'm doin', doin' the Humpty Hump
Do me, baby! Do the Humpty Hump, do the Humpty Hump"

(The song fades out slowly. THE GIRL, suddenly renewed with life and joy, throws her arms around HIM. HE embraces her. The OTHER, seeing this, retreats to another part of the space. She looks on.)

HIM:

Hi.

GIRL:

Hi. I'm not a curmudgeon.

HIM:

I know...you're far too mysterious to be a curmudgeon.

GIRL:

Is that right?

HIM:

Yep, I remember you. Never saying much. Ms. "Look at me: I'm all mysterious and cool."

GIRL:

Oh, yeah? Well, I remember you. Mr. Funny Guy. Mr. "Hey! Look at me. I got the jokes! I can make you laugh!" I guess that's all there is to you?

HIM:

Pretty much. How's the creating going?

GIRL:

It isn't.

HIM:

I can see that. These look the same as they did yesterday.

GIRL:

How would you know?

(They chuckle. Beat. The OTHER begins to creep up behind them with the toy gun.)

HIM:

So...

GIRL:

So...Why haven't you called me?

(The OTHER jumps from a higher plane in the space over their heads and lands facing them with the gun.)

OTHER:

Freeze bitches!

GIRL:

Stop! I told you to put that thing down.

OTHER:

No! I wanna play! *(They struggle over the gun.)*

GIRL:

No. I mean it!

OTHER:

Stop it!

GIRL:

Give it to me.

OTHER:

No! Get off me!

HIM:

Hey guys, calm down. It's okay.

GIRL:

No, it's not!

OTHER:

Get off of me, you silly fucking bitch!

HIM:

Relax!

GIRL:

Don't you dare tell me to relax!

HIM:

I wasn't—

GIRL:

Why haven't you called me.

OTHER:

Jesus, leave him alone.

GIRL:

Shut up! Answer the question.

HIM:

I can't.

GIRL:

Why not?

HIM:

I just can't.

OTHER:

Wait a second...

GIRL:

I think you can.

OTHER:

Leave him alone!

GIRL:

SHUT UP! Answer me.

HIM:

I can't!

GIRL:

Yes, you can!

OTHER:

STOPPIT!

GIRL:

I just want to know the truth. Just answer the fucking question!

HIM:

I can't do this!

OTHER:

I don't wanna play anymore.

GIRL:

Yes you can!

OTHER:

Did you guys hear me?! I don't wanna play anymore!

HIM:

Don't! Don't make me do this. I won't!

GIRL:

Why not?!

HIM:

I can't!

OTHER:

Wait!

GIRL:

Just tell me the truth!

OTHER:

STOPPIT!

HIM:

Please! God, Stop it!

OTHER:

No no no no no no! STOP!

HIM:

STOP!

GIRL:

WHY HAVEN'T YOU CALLED ME?!

(The next lines overlap. They start softly, but rise and rise until what we hear is a cacophony of sound.)

GIRL:

Mr. Funny guy, right? Mr. "Hey! Look at me. I got the jokes! I can make you laugh!" Mr. Funny guy. I remember you. I remember you. What the fuck are you doing here? Why haven't you called me? Just tell me the truth. Yes, you can. Why haven't you called me? Why haven't you called me? No. Would you CUT IT OUT? No. Put the gun down. Put the gun down. No! OH MY GOD! It's you! It's you! It's you! It's you. It's you. It's you.

OTHER:

"The Humpty Dance is your chance to do the hump. Do me, baby! Do the Humpty Hump, come on and do the Humpty Hump. Do me, baby! Do the Humpty Hump, just watch me do the Humpty Hump." Jesus, leave him alone. Leave him alone! Stop it! Play with me. I don't wanna play anymore. Did you guys hear me?! STOP IT! OH MY GOD! Wake up, you silly fucking bitch! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up. Wake up. Wake up.

HIM:

Yes, I remember you. Never saying anything. I remember you. Ms. "Look at me: I'm all mysterious and cool." I remember you.

All mysterious and cool. I remember you. I can't. No. I can't. I'm sorry. I just can't. Don't! No. I can't do this. Don't! Don't make me do this! I won't! Please God, Stop it! No. I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I remember you! I'm sorry! OH MY GOD! It's me! It's me! It's me! It's me. It's me. It's me.

(The frenzy reaches the breaking point. Then, a hush falls over the room. HE wraps his arms around the OTHER passionately from behind, his eyes focused on the GIRL. HE wraps his hand lovingly around the gun and her hand and slowly brings it to his temple.)

HIM:

I'm sorry... It's me.

(He pulls the trigger. Again, we hear the sound of a real gunshot go off. Blackout.)

Silence.

(When the lights return, we see only the OTHER and the GIRL. The OTHER is standing in the position he left her in, stunned. THE GIRL has fallen to the floor where she began. She looks up at THE OTHER, startled as before. THE OTHER lowers the gun, and then drops it on the floor. They both understand. She turns to the GIRL. They gaze at each other. Then she crosses to the GIRL and crawls up into her lap. The GIRL holds her close.)

GIRL:

Morning, sunshine.

THE END.

Cold Duck

By Brandon Chance Caruthers

Characters:

Ashley – Female, 20-24, the more moveable member of the crew, she intermingles with the rest of the social cliques and is the reason why they show up at the party.

Greg – Male, 20-24, Easy going, one of the "slower" ones in the group, but that is not to say he isn't just as smart, just not as quick to the draw with his quips.

Terrance – Male, 20-24, Sarcastic and vulgar, usually the one to have to keep Jamie in line.

Jamie – Male, 20-24 Incredibly sharp and very witty but lacking tact in any shape form or fashion. He has no filter and says whatever pops into his mind.

Sara – Female, 20-24, Cynical, incredibly smart, and quick to correct.

Barnaby – Male, 19-21, Typical party boy. Should be younger looking than the rest and still eager to show off his ability to pound the liquor.

Setting:

Takes place in a den, bedroom, office, or sitting room. There is a party going on in the rest of the house and the only prerequisite for the room is that it can be closed off and hold five people for a

conversation. Can take place at any time where a person could walk around easily with a phone.

(Lights up. Greg, Terrance, Sara, and Jamie are in a room at a party. Music is playing softly in the background and then it stops. All four take notice and look around. From the only door to the room enters Ashley on a phone.)

ASHLEY

How did it happen? Wait what? You have to be kidding me. No ma'am, I'm sorry. I know that was rude. No, I don't think this is a joking manner. I'll let Greg know. He's here now. You and your family will be in all our prayers.

GREG

Who was that?

ASHLEY

That was your mother... I have something to tell you, but I'm not sure how to say it.

TERRANCE

We could play hangman.

ASHLEY

No, it's not like tha-

TERRANCE

I'll get some paper. This will be fun.

ASHLEY

No, Terrance, it isn't something I can just write ou-

JAMIE

I get first guess!

SARA

Why do you get first guess? She's trying to tell Greg.

JAMIE

Because I called dibs.

GREG

You never called dibs! I get first guess.

JAMIE

It was implied!

GREG

You don't imply dibs. You have to actually say it!

TERRANCE

How many spaces do we need to spell out the

ASHLEY

YOUR BROTHER IS DEAD, GREG!

TERRANCE

WHAT THE FUCK?!

(long pause)

GREG

Are you serious?

ASHLEY

Greg, I am so sorry. I was in the kitchen and your phone kept ringing and ringing and it was your mom and I didn't know what to do so I answered it and she was crying and I tried really hard to calm her down but she was yelling at me. You're mom is very scary when she is yelling. Then she told me to find you and I couldn't and then she had to leave right as I did and it was all so...

JAMIE

Fucked up?

ASHLEY

You have no idea...

GREG

What happened? Did she tell you how it happened?

ASHLEY

That was the fucked up part.

SARA

21

TERRANCE

What?

SARA

21 if you don't count the comma or the exclamation point.

ASHLEY

See, what happened... Okay. Right. What happened was...

Fuck this is hard.

JAMIE

That's what she said.

ASHLEY

Shut the fuck up.

GREG

Ashley please tell me what happened!

JAMIE

You never count the exclamation point and what comma?

ASHLEY

Well, he was out at the lake.

TERRANCE

At the end of the sentence just before she said "Greg," you dumbass. Like in the sentence I just said, it would be just before I said "you dumbass."

ASHLEY

He had decided he was going to take the boat out.

GREG

Which boat?

SARA

While you are right, your argument is invalid because you used a fragment instead of a sentence, YOU dumbass.

ASHLEY

Your Dad's. He was out cruising around and then, oh wow, this is hard to say..

(All four speak their next lines on top of each other)

TERRANCE

I'LL USE FRAGMENTS IF I WANT! DON'T CALL ME A DUMBASS!

JAMIE

WHAT FUCKING COMMA ARE YOU BITCHES TALKING ABOUT?!

SARA

HOW DID YOU EVEN GRADUATE YOU FIST FULL OF ASS-HOLES?!

GREG

WILL YOU PLEASE JUST TELL ME ALREADY?!

ASHLEY

(over all of them) YOUR BROTHER WAS KILLED BY A DUCK!

TERRANCE

What. The. Fuck?

GREG

As hard as this may be for you to say, can you please, for the love of all things pure and fucking holy, tell me what the FUCK you mean?! How exactly was he killed by a duck?!

JAMIE

So where did we land on the comma?

TERRANCE

Dude, bad time.

ASHLEY

Well, he was at the lake, like I said, and he was in the speedboat, your dad's, like I said, when a duck flew out in front of him. He was going about fifty five, your brother, not the duck, and the duck hit him in the face. From what the doctors can tell, he was knocked unconscious, which wouldn't have really matter when he hit the water because of the life jacket, but the duck's foot was what did it. His foot, the duck's not your brother's, was caught in his necklace, your brother's not the duck's. The duck kept flopping around and trying to get away but couldn't and he, the duck, not your brother, held your brother under the water and drowned him. That's what happened.

JAMIE

Was the duck okay?

SARA

That's the question you ask?

GREG

You are kidding me right? A duck? A fucking duck?

ASHLEY

A fucking duck.

TERRANCE

The duck flew in front of him, hit him and knocked him out?

ASHLEY

Yes.

GREG

What necklace was he wearing? He never wears a necklace! You are joking. This is some kind of fucked up joke.

SARA

Umm... Greg?

GREG

WHAT?!

SARA

I gave him a necklace for his birthday last week.

JAMIE

You did what?

TERRANCE

Good job! You killed him. You fucking killed him!

SARA

Greg, I didn't know! I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!

GREG

How in G-d's name could you have known this would happen? You didn't kill my brother.

JAMIE

The duck did.

TERRANCE

Shut up.

(Pause)

GREG

I can't believe this…

ASHLEY

Now do you see why I had such a hard time telling you?!

SARA

I don't even know what to say.

TERRANCE

I'm sorry dude. Like, really sorry.

JAMIE

Talk about a buzzkill.

TERRANCE

GODDAMN IT JAMIE!

JAMIE

What?!

SARA

This isn't a buzz kill. It's not just some bad news someone got. Greg's brother is dead.

JAMIE

And maybe a duck.

JAMIE

I'm sorry... Dude, I am.

TERRANCE

You aren't sorry. You are a dumb ass. Just shut the hell up.

ASHLEY

Terrance, I know you are trying to help, but maybe we should just give Greg a moment to process this.

(Pause)

(Greg starts laughing.)

GREG

My big, bad Marine of a brother was killed by a duck. A fucking duck.

SARA

It is a kinda funny when you think about it.

TERRANCE

And scary as hell too.

ASHLEY

How is it scary? It's just a duck.

TERRANCE

If a duck can kill Greg's brother, then one could easily kill any of us.

JAMIE

He has a point. Remember that time your brother taped the three of us together in our underwear and left us in the middle of the school fountain?

GREG

I remember you getting a boner and me and Terrance fighting like hell to get away from you.

TERRANCE

Good times… Wait, no the opposite of that.

SARA

I remember when we were going to our junior prom and we were all at your house taking pictures. Geoff took me that year. He said something that he thought was so funny but it was just mean. Your brother walked up and broke Geoff's nose. He felt so bad he put on his dress uniform and took me so I didn't have to go alone. It was kind of sweet.

GREG

I can remember when we were little, we were at some hotel and there was a duck pond. We both took off running for it with these wooden swords we got at some shop we had stopped at on the way and he ended up hitting a duck in the head. He cried all the way back to the room and refused to come out of the bathroom because he thought he killed it. He hadn't. It was just knocked out.

ASHLEY

Are you serious?

GREG

It's insane how ironic life can be. My big brother, who knocked a duck out and thought he killed it, was killed by being knocked out by a duck.

JAMIE

I think it's how he would have wanted to go.

TERRANCE

How can you be this stupid?

(pause)

(Door swings open and Barnaby enters.)

BARNABY

Hey guys, we turned duck duck goose into a drinking game! You wanna come play?

TERRANCE

Go fuck yourself.

THE END.

THE CANNIBALS

By Ahmad Jackson

The following scenes are taken from a play which originated as an observation. This observation soon became a refutation of Rumi's ecstatic poetry when placed under modern & skepticism.

Characters:

The play is written to be performed with a cast of twelve. The characters of Adrian, Danni, Jaime, and A. Nancy have been purposely stripped of their genders; therefore, their roles may be played by male or female actors of the director's choice. The actors will play the following roles:

Adrian – An apathetic twenty-two-year-old trudging along in trendy clothes.
Nathan – A burned-out twenty-five-year-old Adonis dressed in a black shirt, skinny jeans, and chucks. He wears a denim vest with assorted band patches and buttons.
Danni – A dapper twenty-two-year-old never seen without Wayfarers.
Lorelei (Lorrie) –A buxom twenty-six-year-old woman wearing flashy socialite attire. Her eyes are smoky, her leggings ironic, and her top revealing.
Jaime - A vacant youth donning sunglasses and loud colored clothes.
A. Nancy – An androgynous youth clad in bohemian clothes.
The Spiders (6) – A hodgepodge of burnout twenty-somethings donning varying styles of dress.

Setting:

The Present.

Scene 01

A. Nancy's Apartment living room

Jaime and the spiders are dancing and partying about the room with the music blaring. A sporadic knocking comes to the door. Jaime opens the door to reveal Adrian, who slowly enters.

Adrian

(confused) Oh…Hey. Nancy's expecting me. Is he here?

Jaime

Yeah. Come in, and take a seat *(Adrian enters and sit down while Jaime exits for a while. Jaime enters with A. Nancy)*

A. Nancy

What's up, Adrian. Sorry to hear about you and Nathan, man. Shit's awful when it goes south like that. How are you feeling?

Adrian

I've been better. That's actually why I'm here.

A. Nancy

Yeah? Want something to take the edge off?

Adrian

Actually…I, I was wondering if you still have any Meta?

A. Nancy

…Seriously? You feel like talkin' to God now?

Adrian

In a sense. I mean it's what we all planned for this weekend, and I already paid for it. Can't let it all go to waste.

A. Nancy

Okay. How much do you want to do?

Adrian

Well…how about all the hits we bought?

A. Nancy

Whoa, man. You sure? I mean this shit's nothin' to fuck around with.

Adrian

I'm not stupid. I'm not gonna take it all at once. Besides, it's my money, so don't fuck me around with this "caring drug dealer" crap. Just give me what I paid for!

A. Nancy

Alright, alright, alright…Well, you know where the toilet is. *(announces)* Hey Folks! We got our oracle tonight! Make sure our Delphi feels at home. *(The spiders applaud and shower Adrian with encouraging and welcoming remarks while A. Nancy exits and returns with a vial of powder and a glass of liquid, and hands them to Adrian)* Alright. Here's the doses. Mix to your heart's content. *(The party continues as the spiders dance. Adrian mixes the drink and chugs it. The spiders recite A happily dazed Adrian joins.)*

Spiders

Break the legs of what I want to happen.
Humiliate my desire.
Eat me like candy.
It's spring and finally I have no will.

(A spotlight falls onto the bed. Two forms are resting underneath the covers. Altogether, the Spiders shout)

Become this!
fall in Love,
and you will not be separated again.

(The spiders rejoice and lift Adrian onto the bed. As Adrian rests, one of the forms begins moving and speaking)

Nathan

Suddenly the drunken sweetheart appeared
She drank a cup of ruby wine
And sat by my side *(Adrian removes the cover to reveal Nathan)*
Seeing and holding the lockets of her hair
My face became all eyes
And my eyes all hands

(Nathan and Adrian begin kissing passionately. The other form begins moving and speaking.)

Danni

There is some kiss we want with our whole lives,
the touch of spirit on the body...
Breathe into me *(Adrian kisses Danni, and the three proceed to kiss and caress each other under the covers)*

Adrian

Oww. That hurts...Oww! What are you two—OWW! STOP IT! GET OFF ME! *(pushes off the covers and rushes off the bed.*

Adrian has bloody bite marks on the neck and arm) You…you fuckin' bit me. Danni, Nathan! *(Danni and Nathan emerge from the bed with bloody mouths. They speak simultaneously)*

Danni
There is some kiss we want…

Nathan
I can't explain the comings…

Adrian
Shut Up! Shut Up! Shut Up! What's wrong with you guys? Nancy, you see this? Nancy? *(The spiders, Danni, and Nathan encircle Adrian as A. Nancy crosses to the front)*

A. Nancy
"Humiliate my desire. Eat me like candy." Is this not your duty, your desire? To supplicate thine flesh before thy lover, swallow sin to promise purity of the soul? Come! Remove thine thorny crown, join thy fellows and claim what thou covet from greedy hands *(Danni and Nathan cross to the front beside Adrian and kneel)*

Danni
Do you think there isn't? You don't feel something for me—some thing between us…

Jaime
Take their Eucharist, and join flesh with spirit.

Adrian
No, I…I…

A. Nancy

Accept thy destiny. Take the covenant; join Cybele's children, and she'll share her treasured sight. Strip yourself; expose your bones and drape your heart as the Ancients before you. Become this! Fall in Love, and you will not be separated again. *(Adrian kneels next to Nathan and reluctantly bites him)*

Spiders

Become This! Become This! *(Adrian draws back with a bloody mouth and glances at Danni)*

Danni

I was lying there in your lap for so long, hoping I'd get a kiss from you…

Adrian

Shut up! Stop it! Oh God, God, this can't be… *(A male and female Spider approach Adrian)*

Adrian

No…no, No! There is no fuckin' soothsayer…this is not… *(The Spiders begin commanding and jeering various things at Adrian)* Stop it…stop it! It's just a…just a drug…just…*(Adrian rushes for the trashcan and violently pukes. The Spiders gather around Adrian in disgust. They hiss and whisper in Adrian's ear until the youth passes out)*

Danni

Didn't hurt as much as I thought it would…

Scene 02

A. Nancy's living room.

Adrian is lying facedown next to the trashcan. There is a sound of downpour rushing outside. Lorelei enters with a sopping wet umbrella.

Lorelei

Yo, Nancy! I'm here. Where you at? *(She discovers Adrian, and crosses over to the body)* Adri-Adrian! *(She rouses Adrian)* Wake your ass up! Christ. What happened? What are you doing here? *(She drags Adrian to the closest wall)* I asked Nancy to me find me some blow for my trip back, but why—

Adrian

Meta…

Lorelei

...You didn't? Now...Goddamnnit!...how much did you do?

Adrian

...all of it—

Lorelei

YOU DID MY META TOO?! That was my shit, Adrian. My doses!…so did you get your truth? Did you get that big booming voice or did you get Alan Rickman?

Adrian

Neither. *(laughing)* I only saw what my heart wanted me to see… butterflies in dusty jars. Like any other substance…

Lorelei

Sounds like you wasted your money. Well, I'm glad one of us tried it out before I threw my money down the trash with your

dinner. Where is Nancy anyway?

Adrian

Probably spoutin' some hand-me-down wisdom about shootin' stars or some bullshit! I don't know...

Lorelei

Shit, sorry I asked...so is that what your heart told you? Nancy and the others are tricksters? You think they know nothing about love?

Adrian

Like we're any different. We've been fucked from the start—spoon-fed ideals from birth, what do you expect to happen? Of course you're disappointed when you find it on your own. They always fall short of your expectations.

Lorelei

Yeah, it's called vanity. Most idiots only look for a mirror in their partners. It's perfectly natural. I don't get the fuss you're making...

Adrian

I mean we inherit these grand, flawless temples from our elders, and our eyes are so blinded by the light of the burning altars, we don't mind the smell of our ancestors rotting away in the crawlspace. And what do our elders tell us?

Lorelei

Okay... what about Oscar Wilde? He said, "The consciousness of loving and being loved brings a warmth and richness to life that nothing else can bring." *(Jaime and two spiders emerge)*

Adrian

Too flowery. That nonsense wouldn't last you a month.

Lorelei

Means a lot coming from a child of Rimbaud. Look, this is all cute, but I'm gonna see if Nancy left some coke here *(She exits.)*

Adrian

Fuck you… *(Danni and two Spiders emerge. One of the Spiders speaks)*

Spider 01

"Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look, which becomes a habit"

Adrian

Sounds like a martyr to me, or a masochist depending on the type of whip. *(Nathan and two Spiders emerge. One of them speaks)*

Spider 02

"Love is an angel disguised as lust"

Adrian

An argument Jezebel would be proud of… *(Two spiders emerge)*

Spider 03

"Men love because they are afraid of themselves, afraid of the loneliness that lives in them and need someone in whom they can lose themselves as smoke loses itself in the sky." *(Danni, Nathan, and the Spiders sit and lounge about on seats and floor. Not one of them are looking at each other)*

Adrian

(chuckles) What's the point of these clever little sayings. They only blind us from the real thing—something we can only know with our own groping fingers, our own fists and our own lips.

Jaime

Fuck 'em. Fuck the rituals and the temples; we're only limited by our own shame. Just look at Serrano. He took a piss on his Church and made his Savior into flesh with a one stream.

Adrian

Shall we do the same with our own Church?

Jaime

I guess we're getting more beer. PEOPLE WE GOT URINE SAMPLES TO COLLECT!

Adrian

More than that. We'll scrub the floors clean of the spilt blood and seed from our dearly departed.

Spider 01

Let's ditch the Venus & Adonis at the door—replace them with our own shapely virgins and bony bums on the street.

Nathan

We'll paint our own tales—scour the walls with murals of an online hook-up and Megan's special list…

Danni

Not to mention two broken condoms and a failed abortion…

Spiders 2-5

All leading to the birth of a baby-faced hustler with the strength of 5 keg stands…A middle class prophet who left his followers swinging in the rafters with a sweet taste of ennui…And his cohort--a milk carton starlet wearing the scent of Kierkegaard's despair…A raven-haired hipster who dazzled the free clinics of New York with her seven veiled dance

Adrian

The fevered dream ends here in this city—in its brooks of winding concrete and assholes…*(leaps out the window)*

Spider 04

"By Gis and by Saint Charity, Alack, and fie for shame! Young men will do't, if they come to't; *(A crash and a woman's screams are heard outside.)*

Spider 05

By cock, they are to blame. Quoth she, before you tumbled me, You promised me to wed.

Spider 06

So would I ha' done, by yonder sun, An thou hadst not come to my bed." *(Lorelei enters with a bag of powder.)*

Lorelei

You know, you think dealers would have better security with their shit. *(She does a bump)* I know you already had your wild night, so I won't—*(looks around)* Adrian? Adrian… *(She does another bump and looks to the window)* When is this storm

gonna be over? Damn it *(She walks to the window and closes it)* Adrian! If you're still here and you need a ride, I'm about to head out! *(She does another bump and sits down)* Holy fuck…this is… wow. *(A soaking wet Adrian enters from the door. She is soaking wet.)*

Adrian

I fuckin' swear this rain is never gonna let up! *(Lorelei does another bump and stretches out on the floor. Jaime hands Adrian a towel to dry off with.)*

Jaime

Took your sweet time, did you?

Adrian

(to Jaime) Fuck off. *(To Lorelei)* So what's a girl gotta do to get fed around here?

Lorelei

Adrian, I feel kinda weird. Like I'm floating, you know. *(She does another bump)* Shit's better than I thought it'd be…. *(The two continue talking while the lights fade out)*

THE END

PROSE

Jessica Hamlin
True Design

The curvy hooked-handled umbrella sits alone in the dark closet. She often wishes she were not there and feels that she is truly a parasol. Her curve feels that it was designed to be held by a lady's gentle hand. Her rod feels that it was meant to stand strong and tall, proud to be held and proud to protect her smiling mistress. Her body feels that it was meant to blossom out against the sunshine, letting the heat gently kiss her as a soft breeze would softly lick and lift her from underneath. She and her mistress would stroll whatever path the lady chose. The umbrella would not have minded being led, as long as it was by someone as gentle as she.

Instead, the curvy hooked-handled umbrella sits alone in the dark closet, dreading the days of painful rain and onslaught. It is on these days that she is dragged out by her master, roughly unfurled, pressed open and pushed out into the hard-beating rain. He holds her painfully straight in order to protect his own head from getting wet while she feels every pounding drop thud and slide against her body. He grips her curve too tightly and holds her too close to him as the tearing wind tries to rip her away. She feels its ferocity try to rip at her insides, freezing her rod that is braced against his hunkered and plodding self. When they reach their destination, she is shaken, de-plumed, then shoved in a corner somewhere, where she will be picked up to serve him again when the day is done.

But perhaps one of these days, he will forget her. He will leave her alone, too busy with things far more important than a curvy hooked-handled umbrella, and leave her in the corner while he walks home and enjoys the sun for himself. No longer in a closet hidden by darkness, compressed behind long coats

and stiff sleeves. No longer bricked in by boxed up musky memories and the decaying rank of well-intended ideas.

Then perhaps, one day, someone will pick her up from the abandoned corner of who-knows-where and take her for a stroll. Gentle hands that would perhaps carry her gently down beaten paths that the new owner was familiar with. Scared hands that would delicately hold the curve as her un-blossomed self would rest carefully on his worn-torn shoulders. She would never be given to a lady as she so desired to be, but she would see the world through a sunny perspective and would be able to offer protection from all of the elements, hot or cold, to those alone. Through her shelter, the hopeless would see the new owner's pricked brow more clearly and could find the way back home. If ever she would be broken, he would let her rest and carefully repair her from the inside out, all the while whispering, "My dear sweet parasol." She would never belong to a lady, but at least the curvy hooked-handled umbrella would be accepted, loved and safe and would no longer be in the closet.

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Section D1, Life and Local

I was still putting in an earring when the pounding began on the front door.

"POLICE! OPEN UP!" Tha-thump-tha-thump. The door groaned. "We have a warrant!"

"I need a minute!" I called back, still trying to line up the post and the earring back as it turned over and over in my fingers. My hands were shaking slightly.

"YOU DON'T GET A MINUTE! OPEN UP!" My front door was attacked by a pair of steel-toed boots from the outside.

Done with the earring, I gave myself a glance in the

mirror and went for the door.

Apparently the towering police officer on the other side had been gearing up for a really good swing, because when I opened the door he came crashing into me in a tripping stumble to avoid my feet, swearing right left and sideways. Something I didn't tell my mother about being friends with cops was the way they talked. She was under the impression that the harshest profanity I had heard was a hearty "darn."

"My neighbors probably hate you," I informed him as he recovered and swept his hair out of his eyes.

He shrugged. "This is a nice complex. Usually I get the door to give." He eyed me seriously, but the left corner of his mouth twitched. "Also, I haven't seen a single cockroach."

"Gross, Rush."

"Well?" He paused for the first time and muttered embarrassedly, "You look.... really nice."

"That's all I get?" I laughed. "A 'really nice'?"

"Two out of ten." He was back to teasing as he pulled me into a crushing hug.

"You look skinnier," I said to the front of his jacket. "Did you lose some weight?"

"Yea," he snickered, letting me go, "About fifteen pounds of Kevlar. You've never seen me out of the vest?"

"I have," I countered. "Sweatshirts."

"Because that's the same as my dress blues." He fussed with the buttons and swiped off his glasses. He turned them over in his rough hands for a minute and put them back on with a laugh after fingering the frames. "Forgot I can't wipe 'em on a shirttail. Are you ready?"

"If you are," I said, grabbing my purse from off the kitchen table and triple-checking the contents. "My phone's on vibrate, is yours?"

"I'm wearing a pager, if it goes off, it goes off. It's six now, reservations are for seven, it's a twenty-minute drive with the lights –"

"You brought the cruiser?" I skidded to a halt in the doorway.

He shrugged. "It's what I have. Do you want to drive in those shoes? You could stab somebody through the heart with the heel."

"No lights," I said, shouldering my purse. "Or siren."

"I was considering it."

"You would." I shoved at his arm before he pulled my hand into the crook of his elbow and we headed carefully down the hall. I only wobbled once.

"I'm not sure why they need us to dress up like High School Prom. We're all adults."

"That's why," I said, as we strolled into the parking lot and were hit by a blast of icy air. Rush popped the locks on the police cruiser (in a rather cheeky move he had parked in the No Parking zone on the curb) and then remembered to clumsily reach around me and open the door. "My mom is thrilled I get to go. She says it's a good way to make connections."

"Sorry about it," he said as I slid cringing into the passenger's side seat. "I know the leather pretty much freezes in October and doesn't thaw until April."

It wasn't really the seat's temperature, although that was part of it. Maneuvering in a patrol car was an art form that I had simply never understood. Newly-promoted Sergeant Rush had mastered it in about eight years, and at over six feet, neatly folded himself in half. I simply prayed that whatever my feet were sitting on in the floorboard wasn't thousands of dollars' worth of police equipment, although odds were it was.

"Do you remember the first time we did this?" he asked, slapping the steering wheel and cursing between his teeth as the car

groaned, turned over, and started with a sputtering cough.

"We've never done this before."

"No, I mean, not the restaurant," he skipped carefully over the word, "The squad car."

I laughed, covering my eyes. "Oh, don't go there."

He did anyway, but I knew he was going to. "So I've busted my ass on patrol –"

"Rush!"

" [I made a mental note to censor this story for my mother] And I get a .... call from Mitzi: 'Hey officer, we've got a news crew headed by a teenager on the side of the .... road – ' "

"Rush, I was twenty!"

"Yea, like two days before – don't smack me while I'm driving, kid, do you want me to run off the road and kill us both – "

"Two weeks before! It was two weeks before."

"So this call comes in, go get the news crew because they're covering that thing on our K-9's and we need the good publicity, and I was about to say hello, no thank you, but this was Mitzi, and she's a broad –"

"Rush! That's rude!"

"She is!" he glanced over at me, "You can't argue! She's a broad but I love her, so I went."

I rolled my eyes but let him continue.

"So I pull up and there's this woman with enough war paint for two exotic dancers and she's screeching at a twiggy girl in the loudest blue shoes I've ever seen. Sky high heels."

"They were peacock blue, very trendy. I had just bought them."

"And you're all up to your thighs in mud with a busted-ass news van sagging in the ditch. So I walk over and go what's the deal, and you wobble up to me in those heels and go..."

He raised his gravely bass by a good two octaves and adopted a British accent, "Good day sir, I'm Sandra McClellan, I'm terribly sorry to bother you."

I sighed. "Then Gregory and I got in the car and I covered the story about your K-9 unit."

"It's a late-night sketch: a cop, a cameraman, and a teenager get into a squad car. Better than the pope and the rabbi." He shifted his grip on the steering wheel and threw me a quick grin, flashing white in his coarse beard. "I was worried I wouldn't have room in the damn car, they pack us to the gills! You sat like a stoic little bird, your muddy blue shoes on the paperwork in the footwell. Mitzi and I had a good laugh over it," he confessed. "I got back and told her, listen, there's this green-eyed, freckle-faced kid on the side of the road who looked like she was just about to start hitchhiking."

I laughed because for all his teasing he was right. "Okay, I was, I was mad."

"I think you had your thumb out – or some other finger –"

"Rush!" I swiped my bangs out of my eyes with another laugh, almost ending in a snort. "You know I have more class than that."

"Sure. Sometimes."

We drove in silence for a few minutes before he sighed almost theatrically. "I wish we were going to hit some crap-burger joint."

"In these clothes? It took me an hour to get my hair like this."

"Yea, but…" He wrinkled his nose. "I don't even know why the hell I was invited."

"Because you got a recent promotion. If you were still a buddy beat cop you wouldn't have been invited. It's just a dinner-

thing, a gala. The mayor throws one every year for public service members. It's lovely and classy."

"I'm not eating snails."

"Oh my gosh, Rush, nobody said you're eating snails."

He sighed and readjusted his grip on the steering wheel. "And I'm taking you because I'm sure as hell not taking another cop. People are going to ask how old I am and then roll their eyes like I'm a f.... fricking cradle robber. I also have a ponytail."

"The glasses counteract the ponytail," I said. "You wear strong black frames too, like an intellectual. Besides," I adjusted a beaded strap on my dress, "I'm an arm-date, not the real thing. It'll be fine."

"You're barely not jail-bait. Want to swing by a crap-burger joint anyway?"

"Not when City Hall is picking up the tab for tonight. And you might want to attempt to watch your language. Not much, just – a little around the edges."

"Define the edges."

"Keep it to a PG rating if possible?"

Rush drummed tunelessly on the steering wheel with two blunt fingers, the nails cut to the quick. "I knew I brought you for a reason."

"Don't freak out. It's just a dinner. Don't answer your pager at the table."

"Sandra..." he grimaced, the corners of his mouth quirking downwards, little feathery lines fanning around his eyes. "I haven't been to a restaurant with an entrée over ten dollars in years."

"Also, here your entrée means your appetizer."

"Dammit, it would. Just keep me from embarrassing the entire city police force?"

"I'll do my best." I said. "Isn't that why you brought me?"

I meant to tease, but for some reason I heard something in my own voice that I wasn't sure about.

"Yep," he replied, but the word sounded stiff, made from cardboard. We drove the rest of the way in a comfortable silence other than the static of ten-codes coming in over the radio, peppered with profanity and jokes. My breath made a foggy cloud on the window and I resisted drawing in it.

***

I knew we were in trouble when Mitzi (the captain of Rush's police precinct) greeted us inside the restaurant, in a slinky black evening dress and the bitterly-sweet smell of a cigar drifting over her perfume. She stood nearly as tall as Rush in her current heels.

"This is a mess. Hey, here's some other cops, thank God, plus Sandra representing Channel 48 at 5."

"I'm still an intern," I reminded her as she shook hands. She had a vice-like grip and I felt involuntary tears well in my eyes when her fingers snapped down over mine.

"You'll want a smoke," I heard her lean in and whisper to Rush, her earrings tinkling noisily. "I've already had two. They're acting like they're the Feds or something."

"It'll ruin my dinner," he replied with a quick glance over at me. I nodded. "I'll get a smoke later; I've got some rolling around in the glove box. Right now I'm starving."

"...How big is a quail?"

I murmured an apology to the wife of the hospital director sitting across from me and turned. Rush, leaning over, was so close that his beard tickled my ear unmercifully.

"I'm not quite sure," I said dubiously. "I think about as big as a Cornish game hen."

"It's twenty-seven dollars." I felt the wince in his voice. He glanced over at me, dark eyes calculating. "That's six on-shift

dinners when I'm working. That's over a week."

"City Hall's buying, remember? Try the quail."

"This is too much," Rush muttered. "I feel like I'm playing tea-time with my niece. Why the hell do I need fifty forks?"

"The police force is all about efficiency," I explained to the hospital director's wife, who had previously been watching Rush fret with mild confusion, her plucked eyebrows furrowed but not meeting.

"Sergeant Rush," I said, putting a hand on his arm. "This is Mrs. Cathy Johnson."

He shook her hand with an uneasy smile and a look on his face that said he had no idea why he should know her.

"Mrs. Johnson is Mr. Johnson's wife –"

"I'm not a detective but I've got that much."

"You didn't let me finish! The hospital director."

Rush brightened. "The troph – I mean, you're his second – I mean, I heard you got married not too long ago."

She stared at him blankly for a fraction of a second before gracefully changing the topic of conversation: "Do you enjoy working as a police officer, Sergeant?"

"Absolutely. You see the strangest things." I prayed that Rush wouldn't tell the story about the bathtub to a round table of several more important people. It was very… cop, for lack of a better term. Unfortunately it was one of his favorites and he went right for it. Mrs. Johnson laced her fingers, careful of her large rings, and set her sharp little chin on them.

"My partner and I went to take a call about something smelling in an apartment. Sort of a run of the mill thing. So we take the call. The apartment is on the South side of town, sort of in a slummy place, and I'm wondering, why the hell do they worry about smell? I mean the whole damn area smells. So we're walking up the stairs, crunching these huge-ass cockroaches in

our wake, and we get to the apartment. It's empty, but the smell – man, I was trying to swallow. It was bad. You know your gag reflex? Ding, on the button. So my partner – who had, I dunno, eight years on? Something, and me, we basically crawled into the bathroom, which is where the smell is, and there's something in the tub, about two inches deep."

A muscle in Mrs. Johnson's cheek was twitching. "… what?"

"That's the thing, we don't know. Hell, I'm still not sure. It was clotted and an ashy gray, like soupy but with bits. Found out later that it was… entrails? Something like that. Literally, guts. At any rate, we're bout just about to die, and my partner looks over at me, and he goes… 'They're going to need one hell of a plumber.'"

The worst part was, I had heard this before, crammed shoulder to shoulder with Rush and several other of his squad members in a booth of a cheap breakfast chain past midnight. It had been intensely more graphic and for this telling he had really done a good job of toning it down. He snickered at his own punchline for a moment.

"Nothing surprises me anymore," he said casually, straightening his multiple forks. "Not after stuff like that. It wasn't even a Friday."

My phone in my purse began to vibrate just as the entrées came out. I wasn't sure how to salvage the conversation, but there could be nowhere to go but up, and I blatantly ignored my phone.

Rush, however, was attempting to handle himself with a little more dexterity. "Funny stuff happens too. I was talking to an interviewer at a restaurant about a recent drug bust," he continued around a mouthful of calamari. "I had to scream to be heard; it was incredibly crowded. I kept yelling between the new

interviewer –" he elbowed me playfully in the ribs, "And my partner for clarification: 'so there was coke?' 'Tons of coke!' 'And he was carrying coke!' 'Twenty pounds of coke!' We all look up at the end of the conversation and lo and behold, the harried waitress has brought us about twenty glasses of coke - the drink. And that damn skinflint made us pay for it!"

"Here, I got some caviar, pass it down," Mitzi called from her seat to the left of to Rush. He took the plate from her and passed it to me. I was reasonably sure that etiquette didn't call for such generosity, but I scraped off some onto my salad to try. It was very interesting.

"I think I've got twenty bucks stuck in my teeth," Rush whispered to me.

Mrs. Johnson had decided to commandeer the conversation after the story about the bathtub. "I always order Escargots," she said airily, but I noticed she mispronounced the French. "It's so exotic a dish. I'm thrilled that we have a restaurant in town that offers it."

"Seems more a poor man's dish, if you ask me," Rush interjected. "Eating something out of the garden so it doesn't get your tomatoes first." He leaned over to me and whispered into my ear, "Holy hell, it *moved.*"

We all glanced over at her plate. Rush was squinting at the delicacy. Mrs. Johnson was toying with it with her fork, probably, I thought, comparing the color to a bathtub full of… something. It might have been my imagination, but it did appear to move. My phone started buzzing again and I looked around guilty.

Down the table, Mitzi was talking national politics with the Fire captain. Who had the bright idea to sit them together wasn't a particularly smart individual. They both sat comically stiff and kept making issues like gun control more about the

other's incestuous relationship to their family, or the lack of connections thereof. I noticed that when the main dishes came in, Mrs. Johnson smiled gratefully and returned her plate with six of eight snails still rolling around on it.

Rush stared tragically at the quail. "You lied to me; I thought you said it'd be as big as a chicken."

"Not a chicken," I corrected gently, "A Cornish game hen."

Rush sighed and debated for a moment before picking up his dessert fork and a knife in an attempt to carve up the quail. I knew almost guiltily that it was going to end with him just eating it with a small snapping of bones and Mrs. Johnson and her husband with the sagging jowls chatting about it with the district attorney.

Again, my phone began to vibrate so that my entire purse was shuddering. I couldn't take it another minute and (my mother would have been horrified) answered my phone at the table.

"Hello. Yes! I'm here at the dinner.... What?" I wrinkled my nose. "Oh, no! Gosh, no, she didn't! Oh that's awful!" I glanced around the room. "No. I'm really sorry; I have to call you back later. Bye."

Rush, still impaling the quail, was studying me acutely.

"I'm terribly sorry," I explained around the entire table, "I've had a family emergency. Please excuse me for just a moment." I stood, shouldered my purse, and walked as quickly as I could for the exit. It wasn't ten seconds before Rush joined me, pulling my arm into the crook of his elbow. "What's this getting up without me shi- crap?"

"Oh, my aunt Molly is in the hospital again with her foot."

"...Do you have an Aunt Molly?"

Rush had earned his reputation for being shrewd. "In Wisconsin," I admitted. "Don't worry, I'm not asking you to drive me to Wisconsin."

"Are you kidding, it's the only thing a gentleman would do."

The wind slapped us both in the face as we emerged from the claustrophobically warm interior. I wasn't sure if I felt relieved or like I wanted to run back in. Rush threw an arm around my shoulders and I flattened myself against his side. We made it out to the cruiser and Rush spend a few long moments fumbling with his keys before he got it unlocked and we ducked it. It was almost worse than outside because the cold had settled.

"I was rude to leave," I said with a sigh as we sat with the car idling to warm up.

"The quail was dry," Rush said. "And don't worry; they'll just say 'she's a teenager, addicted to that there gall-darn technology.'"

"It had been ringing for ten minutes! Ten!"

"Hell, I feel you; my pager had gone off I'd have answered it. It could be anything from want to hang out and have a beer to we've got an officer down."

I sighed as we pulled out of the parking lot and stared down the road. Rush snorted. "She's gotten a nose job since she married him, and I know why. Also, Mr. Johnson was looking particularly decrepit tonight for some reason. She's probably poisoning him."

"You're allowed to look decrepit when you're seventy," I weakly attempted a defense.

"Not when you marry twenty-seven-year-olds." Rush snorted. "I guess I should be talking, huh, in my seasoned thirties taking somebody who can't drink yet."

"Three months, that's all."

"Which, I apologize, was extremely rude. We could have gotten smashed. It would have made for an excellent story for tomorrow's Life and Local section, yea? 'Intern Sandra McClellan and Sergeant H. Rush had a fine time dancing on the table at last night's gala.'"

I laughed, and for the first time since four o'clock in the afternoon didn't worry about ruining my mascara.

"Ironically," I managed, "This is exactly like senior Prom. I dressed up, and so did Sean J. Maples the second, and we went for ten minutes before leaving."

"Let's completely round out your déjà vu by hitting a diner or something, huh?" Rush glanced over and crinkled his nose. "I'll even let you wear my jacket, Miss McClellan. It smells a little like cigarettes and all your girlfriends will notice my dress uniform and be jealous that you've got those kinds of connections."

"Sure thing," I agreed.

He glanced over at me with a strange gleam in his eyes, laughed, and flicked on the siren.

LaToya T. Peeples
You Were Created To Be Who You Are

We All are Spiritual Beings and All Living Things are connected - integrally part of all existence.
All Life Revolves, Evolves, and Influences all other.

Our reflections of others are mirrors of ourselves, therefore, if we love others – love will return to us.

Love yourself, because there is no other living being in the

Universe that is exactly like you. Love other living things, because they are just as mystical as you.

Do not allow others to dictate your values or Journey – Nor should you dictate others. Your task is not to follow the norm, emulate, or compete with others; but to discover who you are, your gifts & talents, your Self, then to have the courage to be it. Next, determine how you can use that which you are, to enhance and aid others.

Nothing is by accident, everything in existence is here to serve a purpose - It is meant to be. From the smallest to the largest, you are in everything and everything is in you.

Picture: Soil, Wind, Rain, Sunshine
A tree, stream, flower, mountain, sky, fire, grass, stars

Now, **Picture:** You

Picture: Black, Yellow, Red, White, Brown, Olive
Now, Picture: You

Picture: Softness, Passion, Kindness, Laughter
Now, **Picture:** You

Picture: Humbleness, Poetry, Courage, Boundlessness
Now, **Picture:** You

Picture: Man, Woman, Boy, Girl
Picture: Spiritual Creature, Nature, Majesty
Picture: Love – Existence

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